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Letter dated 19 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a briefing for media representatives held by Lieutenant General Sergey Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Churkin**

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Annex to the letter dated 19 January 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Briefing for media representatives, held by the Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces

From 0000 hours on 30 December 2016, a ceasefire — which does not apply to the international terrorist groups Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front — came into force throughout Syria.

The ceasefire is being monitored 24 hours a day by the Russian and Turkish Joint Commission.

The ceasefire is generally being observed, despite several acts of provocation against Syrian forces and opposition groups from Nusrah Front terrorists.

There is a downward trend in the number of violations over a 24 hour period. This creates favourable conditions for negotiations with the opposition, to be held in Astana on 23 January 2017, for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis.

The Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arabic Republic is receiving communications from the representatives of various opposition groups wishing to participate in the negotiations in Astana.

In turn, the Russian Ministry of Defence supports increasing the number of participants from the opposition. However, the negotiating process must include those opposition representatives with a real influence on armed units on the ground.

The prerequisite for participation in the negotiations is written confirmation that a specific armed group has joined the ceasefire, indicating its size, the territory that it controls and the State that will act as a guarantor of compliance with the terms of the truce.

Over the past two months, Russian experts have been carrying out the difficult and sensitive work of handling communications from opposition representatives.

The aim is to create conditions for negotiations in Astana that ensure a genuine dialogue among all responsible stakeholders for the good of the Syrian people.

The operational situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Operations carried out by the United States-led coalition group near the Iraqi city of Mosul have largely led to most ISIL forces being pushed into the eastern part of Syria where, almost unhindered, they are redeploying their weapons, explosives and troops towards Palmyra, Dayr al-Zawr and the city of Bab, which borders Turkey.

Moreover, we have received information, confirmed by several sources, about a large amount of explosives being transferred to the Palmyra area in order for ISIL terrorists to destroy that city's historic world heritage sites.

Government troops, supported by the Russian Air Force, are currently engaged in offensive operations against ISIL fighters near Palmyra.

A challenging situation is facing the city of Dayr al-Zawr, which has been besieged by ISIL terrorists for around three years.

Using their overwhelming numerical superiority, fighters are incessantly attacking the positions of Syrian troops. If the city is captured, a true genocide awaits its residents. The population of Dayr al-Zawr could be wiped out entirely.

The city's garrison is continuing to resist ISIL terrorists with the support of the Russian Air Force. The necessary measures are being taken to support Syrian army defence units and to stabilize the situation.

On 12 January 2017, representatives of the Russian and Turkish air forces signed a memorandum on flight security and the prevention of air incidents during operations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

This document provides an unprecedented basis for conducting joint operations in Syria to eliminate international terrorist groups.

Today, the Russian and Turkish air forces have carried out their first joint air operation against ISIL over the suburbs of the city of Bab in Aleppo governorate.

The air operation, approved by the Syrian authorities, involved nine attack aircraft of the Russian Air Forces (four Su-24M aircraft, four Su-25 aircraft and one Su-34 bomber) and eight aircraft of the Turkish Air Forces (four F-16 aircraft and four F-4 aircraft).

A total of 36 sites were targeted for strikes.

These were all agreed earlier by the chiefs of staff and aviation command of both countries.

Over the past two days, supplementary reconnaissance of the targets was carried out using unmanned aerial vehicle units and space reconnaissance assets.

The initial results of the strikes carried out against ISIL terrorists show that the joint actions taken by the Russian and Turkish air forces have been highly effective.

The Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides is continuing to work for the restoration of peace in the city of Aleppo.

Specialists from the International Mine Action Centre of the Russian Armed Forces have cleared mines from over 200 socially significant facilities, from 3,210 buildings on an area covering more than 2,000 hectares and from 709 kilometres of roads. They have also defused 26,395 explosive devices.

This has enabled more than 10,000 residents to return to their homes in the eastern neighbourhoods of the city.

Doctors from the Russian Ministry of Defence hospital have provided assistance to more than 5,000 people, including 1,847 children.

In the districts of Aleppo liberated from terrorists, Russian military police officers have provided assistance in rebuilding the law enforcement agencies and in organizing their work for the safety of the public.

The Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides is continuing to distribute hot meals and supply urgent necessities to residents from eastern neighbourhoods of the city.

Russian officers are also continuing to work for the restoration of peace in other areas of Syria.

The local leaders of 1,135 populated areas have now signed agreements to join the reconciliation process.

The roads, infrastructure and public amenities destroyed by warfare in these areas are being rebuilt and the water and electricity supply is being restored, thereby establishing all the conditions for a return to a life of peace.

This work is actively under way in Damascus governorate. One of the most recent examples is remedial work in the Wadi Barada River Valley.

Over 5 million residents of Syria's capital city were left without water since early January 2017, after a water station in Ayn al-Fijah was disabled by terrorist sabotage.

Russian officers were directly involved in organizing the reconciliation of opposing sides in nine populated areas.

As a result, 2,274 fighters ended their resistance. The vast majority laid down their weapons and returned to civilian life. Fighters not wishing to remain in the reconciled areas were given an opportunity to depart with their families to Idlib governorate.

The outcome of these actions has been a return to peace in the Wadi Barada Valley and the repair of the water supply system. The water supply to Damascus will shortly be fully restored. This work will also continue in other parts of Syria.